



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.



NEW YORK SIGNS.

BY JAMES CARRUTHERS.

CHAPTER I.

IN a large proportion of business signs decorative effects are aimed at, for a point is gained in pleasing the eyes of the public as well as in providing indices to firms or business or both. Signs, on the whole, however, grievously interfere with the architrave features of façades. Columns and their capitals, plinths, string lines, cornices are, in many instances, ruthlessly covered; even window spaces are invaded, and sky lines strangely metamorphosed.

Firms occupying a building exclusively have a clear advantage in securing slightly sign displays, their signs not being liable to be injured by the contrasts in form and color of a heterogeneous display on a façade of signs fashioned without reference to each other, and possibly affixed at various angles. In such case, with possibly, new and old, shabby and handsome, florid and tastefully subdued signs brought together, the best devices suffer. Increased attention is being given to good design and coloring of signs through improved taste and skill of decorative sign painters, and by the requirements of the superior business structures now raised, and to which signs must conform in regard to elegance of appearance. Individual competition, too, has its influence in stimulating improvement. Let an attractive first class sign appear in a neighborhood where such signs are rare, and forthwith surrounding evidences of emulation appear.

With all the variety of signs, it is evident that a considerable number of painters follow in a rut as far as color is concerned. There is too great a predominance of black—the negation of all color in lettering and in grounds. It is an easy resort for furnishing strongly defined contrasts of forms, and certainly intensifies the hue of gilding, but its funeral hue lacks the best feature of a sign, that of freshness, cheerfulness, vivacity of tone, and it lowers the tone of colors, and is affected by the complementaries of the colors in contact. In our view a beautiful shade of red or a russet makes a far better conjunction with gold. Black gives a bluish tint to white, a greenish tint to yellow, and a purplish hue to red, thus subduing their hues, though when mixed with them its effect is rather heightened.

Brass signs, flat and concave, are abounding. They are appreciated for their durability, sightliness, conspicuousness and compactness. Lettering and ornaments on the brass is sunk and coated with black or colored japan applied with the brush and fixed by a high artificial heat. A brass sign to be distinct should be within an easy range of vision, as at a distance the sun's glare would obscure the letters. Any ornamental designs on brass should be severe and precise. A variation of the surface is produced by giving prominence to the rounded heads of nails attaching a sign to its backing. These heads are in brass. It emphasizes the constructive work about them. In old Renaissance wrought iron work was similarly adorned with visible heads of iron nails where bands and bars were riveted.

Pictorial signs become more numerous. Trademarks supply numerous subjects, many of these being really artistic productions. These appear with advantage in the centre of the field. This country surpasses the rest of the world in gigantic pictorial views, such as appear on the exposed sides of houses, not unfrequently, though indifferent as to detail, of great merit in composition, grouping of figures and balance of light and shade, the whole being broadly handled and light and shadow cleverly managed. Expert painters in this line appear to know well the value of "keeping" and breadth as means of powerful effects. Ordinarily the pure primaries largely figure in such productions instead of being merely pronounced hues in secondaries and tertiaries. A lugger, with well filled canvas, making its way through a breezy, surf-laden sea, its decks loaded up with a given article, is an example of the assertive style in respect to popular demand; a brown umbrella, some twelve feet high, floating among rain-bearing clouds, the yellow moon in her first quarter, emerging from the gloom, and a blue atmosphere beneath, duly lettered, exemplifies the graphic; a goddess in a rich glow of color pointing with an uplifted arm to the stars, her left hand resting on some dainty preparation, may be taken as the idealistic style; sylvan glades, with pellucid streams in a sunset view, as adjuncts to a centralized object on sale, whether a Mexican hammock or the equipments of tennis or cricket, may be accepted as an effort at the picturesque. Countless acres of space are thus utilized by those who realize that the great secret of business success is to excite attention.

Our so-called iron age is duly represented in cast iron signs, having raised letters on flat, diapered or reticulated grounds, with suitable borders, the surfaces being electro-plated with copper or nickel, or with both as contrasting metals, or with con-

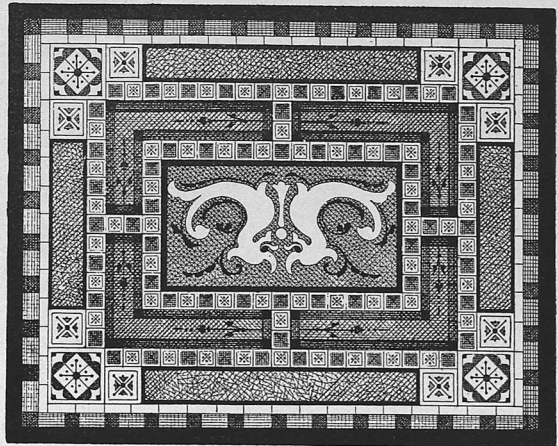
trasting colors, as between letters and ground. Bronzing of the surface is also resorted to. There is at times applied to the surface a copper paint, made from porous copper deposited by the galvanic battery, and which is mixed for its purpose with varnish. The solvent of this varnish is the light and refined petroleum known as benzine. An artificial gold bronze is extensively employed for coating, which is just as good as the finest gold bronze. It is obtained by a mixture of copper and hydrochlorate of ammonia well mixed with vanadate of ammonia and carefully heated, being precipitated in the form of fine golden flakes, which are mixed in a mortar with a solution of varnish. Old bronze is imitated on copper and brass signs by alternate washes of these in diluted acetic acid and exposure to the fumes of ammonia.

Wood block letters of all required sizes and styles have been brought by mechanical means to great perfection, in many instances fancifully ornamented with indented ornaments. They constitute an indispensable adjunct to the wire signs mounted on the roofs of lofty buildings, and when, as is often the case, of large dimensions, are visible at great distances. But their use is not thus confined, and on business signs and façades materially aid scenic effect by light and shade.

Among glass lettered signs we meet with some extremely elaborate work. In these gold and silver leaf are freely used as a ground and for the centre of letters, the latter frequently adorned by what appears incised ornamental figures, the result of the application of hydrochloric acid to those portions of the glass; similarly, in a number of signs, sunk spaces for letters and scroll work are produced, to be filled in with gold and silver leaf. Prominent in the fancy work produced are floral sprigs involved with initial letters, each being kept distinct in colors or color being contrasted with gold or silver. Glass signs in which silvering and gilding appear combined with color, demand the very highest skill. They are backed with asphaltum varnish to render them durable and waterproof.

Hanging signs, which constitute so picturesque a feature of the old cities of Europe, with their curiously elaborate wrought iron cranes and displaying quaint legends, trade symbols and illustrating local tradition, contribute their quota to diversify the aspect of our avenues and streets in less sentimentalized form. Of late more attention has been given to artistic metallic supports, elegant designs in which serve greatly to set them off to advantage. They appear in all varieties of form, from angular and zigzag edges to oval, circular, shield and other curved contours. One mode of treatment in the painting is to present sections of different colors on the ground for the separate lines of lettering. Wire hanging signs, with metallic plates attached, on which are displayed trade marks and lettering, find favor. We may instance a good example of a hanging sign, in which the topmost section is a light shade of drab, while the bottom sections are successively. The letters in the topmost band are of violet blue, the metal letters in gold, with red centre edged in gold. The broad border carved and the bands which separate the different sections are painted in a warm shade of brown edged with gold.

Enamelled white letters of opaque glass have proved extremely serviceable for window lettering. These are molded in the ordinary manner. They may be attached by means of cement, composed of two parts finely powdered white litharge and one part of dry white lead, worked up with boiled linseed oil and lac copal to a stiff paste.



DESIGN FOR TILING, BY R. E. FISCHINGER.